

CHAPTER 20

(Conditional sentences and Wishes)

Unreal Conditionals

The unreal in English is used to talk about things in your imagination, but which are not true. The unreal is often used with *if* and *wish*.

Present Unreal Conditional

The **present unreal** talks about the present time, life today, right now, but imagining (or wishing) something that is untrue.

In a *wish* sentence, or in an *if*-clause, you use the **past tense** to show that the verb is unreal about the present.

The main clause (often called the “result” clause) uses *would*:

If I *had* a lot of money, I *would buy* a house. (The truth is that you don’t have a lot of money.)

If I *knew* Japanese, I *would work* in Tokyo. (The truth is that you don’t know Japanese.)

I wish I *had* a better job. If I *had* a good job, I *would be* much happier.

(The truth is that you don’t have a good job.)

I wish I *knew* how to type. If I *knew* how to type, I *would be* able to get a better job.

(The truth is that you don’t know how to type.)

The verb *to be* is always *were* in the unreal, no matter who the subject is:

He wishes he *were* the mayor. If he *were* mayor, he *would solve* the homeless problem.

(The truth is that he is not the mayor.)

If I *were* taller, I *would play* basketball. I wish I *were* six feet tall.

(The truth is that you are not tall.)

Exercise

1. She doesn't speak English, so she doesn't understand you.

If she _____ English, she _____ you.

2. He can't drive, so he won't buy a car.

If he _____, he _____ a car.

3. He isn't rich, so he won't buy a beach house.

If he _____ rich, he _____ a beach house.

4. He eats too much, so he's fat.

If he _____ too much, he _____ fat.

[Note: You need to use *didn't* in this sentence.]

Past Unreal Conditional

A wished or imagined idea about a **past event** is called the **past unreal**.

The verb in the *wish* clause or *if*-clause is put in the **past perfect** (*had* + **past participle**) to show the past unreal.

The main clause (the "result" clause) will use *would have* + **past participle**.

When I was a child, I hated school. (This is the truth, what really happened. You hated school.)

If I *had liked* school better, I *would have studied* and [I *would have*] *learned* more. I wish I *had been* a better student as a boy. I wish I *had had* better teachers, too. I wish my parents *had forced* me to do my homework.

(The truth is that you didn't like school, you didn't study, you didn't learn, you were not a good student, you didn't have good teachers, and your parents didn't force you to do your homework.)

If she *had reminded* me that yesterday was her birthday, I *would have bought* her a present. At least, I *would have sent* her a card.

(The truth is that she didn't remind you, so you didn't buy her a present.)

I wish the Mets *had won* the game last night! If they *had won*, I *would have made* a lot of money. If the Mets *had beaten* the Yankees, I *would have won* \$200.

(The truth is that the Mets didn't win, and you didn't win any money. You lost!)

Exercise

1. She didn't give me her phone number, so I wasn't able to call her.

If she _____ her phone number, I
_____ able to call her.

2. He didn't have his wallet with him last night, so he didn't buy the book.

If he _____ his wallet with him, he
_____ the book.

3. They didn't get to the airport in time, so they missed their flight.

If they _____ to the airport in time, they
_____ their flight.

[Note: You need to use *wouldn't* in this sentence!]

How to Use 'Wish'

Wishes about the present or future

Wish + (that) + past simple:

We can use 'wish' to talk about something that we would like to be different in the present or the future. It's used for things which are impossible or very unlikely.

- I wish that I had a big house (I don't have a big house, but it's a nice idea!).
- I wish that we didn't need to work today (we do need to work today, unfortunately).
- I wish that you lived close by (you don't live close by).
- I wish that John wasn't busy tomorrow (he is busy, unfortunately).

(*In formal writing, you will see 'were' instead of 'was' after wish. This is correct, but it's also fine to use 'was', in the same way as with the second conditional.

- 'I wish I were rich' or 'I wish I was rich'.)

We also use 'wish' with 'could' to talk about things in the present or future that we would like to be different. In this situation, 'could' is the past simple of 'can'. Of course, we use 'can' to talk about ability - if we know how to do something or not.

For example, 'I can speak Spanish' or 'I can't drive'. We also use 'can' to talk about possibility - if things are possible or not possible.

For example, 'we can't come to the party tonight' or 'John can help you clean up'. We use 'could' with 'wish' to talk about ability and to talk about possibility.

- I wish that I could speak Spanish (but, unfortunately, I can't speak Spanish).
- I wish that I could drive (I can't drive).
- I wish that we could go to the party tonight (unfortunately, we're busy so we can't go).
- I wish that John could help you clean up (John is at work, so he can't help).

We don't usually use 'wish' in this way for things that are really possible in the future.

Instead, we use 'hope'.

- I hope that you pass your exam (NOT: I wish that you passed the exam).
- I hope that it's sunny tomorrow (NOT: I wish that it was sunny tomorrow).
- I hope that Julie has a lovely holiday (NOT: I wish that Julie had a lovely holiday).

Wish + (that) + would:

On the other hand, we use 'would' with 'wish' in a little bit of a special way. It's generally used about other people who are doing (or not doing) something that we don't like and we want that person to change. It's not usually used about ourselves, or about something which nobody can change though, exceptionally, we do use it about the weather.

- I wish that John wouldn't eat all the chocolate. (John does usually eat all the chocolate and I don't like it. I want him to change his behavior!)
- I wish that the neighbors would be quiet! (They are not quiet and I don't like the noise.)
- I wish that you wouldn't smoke so much! (You do smoke a lot and I don't like it. I want you to change this.)
- I wish that you didn't work late so often.
- I wish that it would stop raining!
- We don't usually use 'would' when there's no feeling that we want somebody to change their behavior.
- NOT: I wish that tomorrow would be a holiday. (Instead: I wish that tomorrow was a holiday.)
- NOT: I wish that I would work harder. (It's strange to use 'wish' + 'would' about yourself, as you can change your behavior if you don't like it!)

Wishes about the past

Wish + (that) + past perfect:

We can use 'wish' with the past perfect to talk about regrets from the past. These are things that have already happened but we wish they'd happened in a different way.

This use of 'wish' is very similar to the third conditional.

- I wish that I had studied harder at school. (I didn't study hard at school, and now I'm sorry about it.)

- I wish that I hadn't eaten so much yesterday! (But I did eat a lot yesterday.
- Now I think it wasn't a good idea.)
- I wish that the train had been on time. (But unfortunately, the train was late,
- and so, I missed my interview.)

Other uses of 'wish'

Wish + to + infinitive:

We can use 'wish' with the infinitive to mean 'would like'. This is very formal. We don't usually use a continuous tense with 'wish' in this case.

- I wish to speak to the headmaster. (This means the same as 'I would like to
- speak to the headmaster'.)
- I wish to go now.

Wish + object + to + infinitive:

In the same way, we can use 'wish' with an object and an infinitive.

- I do not wish you to publish this article.
- I wish these people to leave.

Wish + somebody + something:

This is used mostly in set phrases.

- I wished him a happy birthday.
- They wished us Merry Christmas.

✓ For further information see chapter 20 in your textbook.

✓ Do the exercises, please.

Be well and stay safe